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ABSTRACT

This performance guide is designed for teachers to use with students before and after a performance of Judy Blume's "Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing," adapted for the stage by Bruce Mason. The guide, called a "Cuesheet," contains seven activity sheets for use in class, addressing: (1) The Story (offering a brief introduction to the plot and characters and some lines from the play to listen for); (2) Adaptation: Turning a Novel into a Play (looking at how novels are changed into plays, and offering some class activities); (3) Meet the Characters (listing all the characters in the play and looking at how 6 actors play 17 characters); (4) Being a Fourth Grade Nothing (looking at feelings in the play); (5) Behind the Scenes (looking at how director, designers, crew, and stage manager all collaborate to create a play); (6) The Final Collaborator Is... (looking at the audience's important role in creating theatre); and (7) Meet Judy Blume (offering background information about this well known author of children's books). Resources for further information are listed. (SR)

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by Dawn Eddy Molloy

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Judy Blume's TALES OF A FOURTH GRADE NOTHING

Adapted for the Stage by Bruce Mason

The Kennedy Center

CUE SHEET

WELCOME TO CUESHEET, a performance guide published by the Education Department of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, DC. This CUESHEET is designed for use before and after attending a performance of *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*. Look for a pencil by activities to complete.

In this CUESHEET

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Peter Hatcher feels like a fourth grade **nothing**. His little brother, Fudge, steals everyone's attention with his hilarious—but, to Peter, **annoying**—antics. Whether at home, the dentist's, or the shoe store, everybody notices Fudge. What Fudge does to Peter's pet turtle, however, is the last straw! How will Peter deal with Fudge and prove—to himself and to others—that he really is **something?**

Listen for these Lines

Characters' words tell a play's story. Playwrights write lines for actors to memorize and speak. Here are some lines from *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*.

FUDGE: Eat it or wear it! Eat it or wear it!

MOM: You don't hate him. You just think you do.

MRS. YARBY: Ohhh.... Isn't he the cutest little boy? I just love babies.

PETER: Mom doesn't love me anymore. She doesn't even like me. Maybe I'm not her real son. Maybe somebody left me in a basket on her doorstep. My real mother's probably a beautiful princess or a movie star or a famous politician. I'll bet she'd like to have me back.

What do these lines suggest about the characters and the play's story?

What are some different ways the characters might say each line? Practice saying the lines in different ways.

During the performance, listen for how the actors say the lines.

Turning a Novel into a Play

Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing is an **adaptation** of a novel by Judy Blume. Adaptation means change. Changing a novel into a play usually requires changing the story. Playwrights adapt stories for the stage in the following ways:

1) Characters and events may be combined, simplified, or eliminated.

2) Characters and events may be added.

3) Settings may be simplified to avoid complicated scene changes.

After the Performance

Compare the play with the novel. List characters, events, and settings which were changed, combined, added, simplified, or eliminated from the story.

Do you think these changes helped or hurt the story? Why?

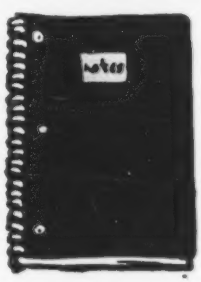
Try your hand at adaptation!

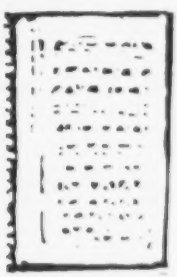
1. Write a paragraph about a problem between two people. (For example: your sister won't let you into her room; your mother tries to make you eat lima beans; your baseball coach won't put you in the game.)

2. Share your paragraph with a friend, choose roles, and act out the problem you described in writing. (You will have to "improvise" your lines. That means that you will make them up as you go along.) Hint: You may want to record the scene that you act out.

3. Now write a play script about the problem. Your script must identify the characters and the lines that they speak. (See page 2 for examples.)

Discuss the challenges of adapting a paragraph into a script. What was difficult? How long did it take to create the script? Which takes longer—reading the paragraph out loud or acting out the script?





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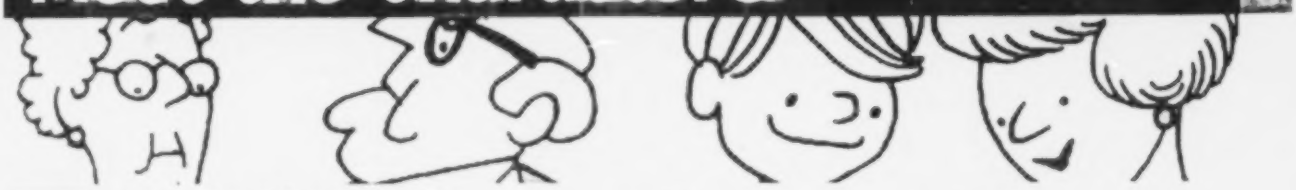
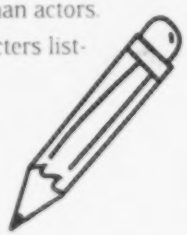
4 Meet the Characters



Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing has seventeen characters, but only six actors. Before the performance, discuss ways that six actors might play seventeen characters. During the performance, watch for the ways in which the people who staged *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* solved the problem of having more characters than actors. Also, watch for the characters listed on the right and then complete the chart below.

Cast of Characters

Peter
Mom
Dad
Fudge
Mr. Yarby
Mrs. Yarby
Jimmy Fargo
Sheila Tubman
Jennie
Ralph
Sam
Nurse
Dr. Brown
Janet
Mr. Vincent
Camera person
Dr. Cone



After the performance

Place the characters in the categories below.

Peter's Family

.....
.....
.....
.....

Peter's Friends

.....
.....

Visitors to Peter's Apartment

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.....
.....
.....
.....

People in the Community

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.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Being a fourth grade (or any grade) nothing.

Before the Performance

With little brother Fudge hogging the spotlight, Peter feels insignificant. Have you ever felt like "nothing"? Write about or draw a picture of a time that you felt unimportant and how you snapped out of that feeling.

After the Performance

Through his actions, Peter shows that he **is** something. Complete the chart below to show what Peter does. Discuss your responses with a friend.

Identify a problem Peter faces.	How does Peter react?	How would you react?
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....

Behind the Scenes

Theater is a **collaborative** art: many people work together to create a play. The cast performs, but a play also requires the work of people that the audience does not see, people who are "behind the scenes." Here are some theatrical collaborators:

designers

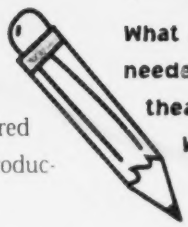
- plan scenery, lighting, costumes, and sound based on the director's concept

crew

- build and operate scenery, costumes, props, lighting, sound

director

- determines the concept—the overall desired effect/goal—for the production
- guides actors in stage movement and understanding roles
- works with designers to create a unified effect—scenery, lighting, costumes, sound, and actions on stage all support the concept



What skills do you think are needed to perform each theatrical collaborator's job? Who would need to: be organized? draw well? enjoy hammering? speak well? be creative? lead a group? be strong? (Watch out! There may be more than one right answer!)

What job would you enjoy? Why?

There is another important theatrical collaborator not listed above. Can you guess who it is?

stage manager

- during the performance, ensures that people and things get on and off stage on cue—at the proper time
- develops and uses a cuesheet—stage manger's "script" listing cues for people and things (Like the stage manager's cuesheet, this performance guide—also called *Cuesheet*—is intended to cue you in to important aspects of the play.)

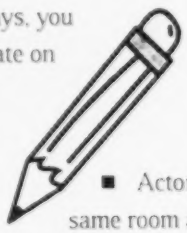
The Final Collaborator is...

The audience is the final collaborator in creating theater. Before the audience arrives, there is no performance; there is only rehearsal. A play needs an audience, so be ready for your role!

The role of a theater audience is different from the role of a television or rock concert audience. When watching television, you often talk or leave the room. During rock concerts, you might sing, clap, shout, dance, and talk about what you are experiencing.

Plays ask for something different. While you may laugh and applaud at appropriate times, your role is to watch and listen carefully. There are good reasons why:

- Plays last longer than 30-minute television programs.
- To appreciate plays, you need to concentrate on what actors say and do.



- Actors are in the same room as the audience and are affected by audience behavior.
- Other audience members will be distracted by extra noises and movement.

Learn your role and be prepared to collaborate with all the people who created *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*. Enjoy the show!

The Differences Between...

Mark the box that applies to each type of performance:

	Television programs	Rock Concerts	Plays
may only last 30 minutes	☐	☐	☐
audience may talk	☐	☐	☐
noise disturbs performers	☐	☐	☐
movements disturb performers	☐	☐	☐
noise and movement disturb others who are watching	☐	☐	☐

Meet Judy Blume

Born in 1938 in Elizabeth, New Jersey, author Judy Blume works her own life events into novels. Judy based her novel *Starring Sally J. Freedman as Herself* on her third and fourth grade adventures in Miami Beach. She captured her fear and triumph in passing her summer camp swim test in *Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great*. Like the teenagers in *Then Again, Maybe I Won't*, Judy and her high school friends hung out in a soda shop and left the waiter's tips in the bottom of a milkshake glass.

When they were growing up, Judy's children, Randy and Larry, provided her with story subjects. Judy wrote *Blubber* based on events in Randy's fifth-grade class, and wrote *Forever* when Randy asked for a realistic teenage love story.

Judy's writing was rejected for two-and-a-half years before her first book, *Iggie's House*, was published. Soon after, she wrote *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret*, based on her feelings growing up. Although *Margaret* won rave critical reviews, many schools—including Randy's and Larry's—found it too controversial to include in their libraries. Some adults felt it dealt too honestly with growing-up issues: fears of not fitting in and questions about changing bodies, for example. Judy was more interested in writing honest stories for kids than in writing books for adult approval, however. She says, "Kids live in the same world as adults do. They see things and hear things. Problems only get worse when there are secrets, because what kids imagine is usually scarier than the truth."

To learn more about Judy's life, read: *Judy Blume's Story* by Betsy Lee. New York: Scholastic, 1981.

The books listed above and other Judy Blume books—including *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*, *Super Fudge*, and *Fudge-a-Mania*—are available from Yearling Books. For a complete list of available titles, write: Dell Readers Service, P.O. Box 1045, South Holland, IL 60473.

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Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing

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